

Grotesque Bodies in Hagiographical Tales

The Monstrous and the Uncanny in Byzantine Collections of Miracle Stories

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The large majority of Byzantine miracle stories that have come down to us in the form of independent collections refer to the miraculous healings performed by the Virgin, a prophet such as Isaiah, or a specific saint or saints (mainly martyrs)¹ over the suffering bodies of individuals both young and old, male and female,² anonymous and eponymous, rich and poor, lay and church people.³ These individuals are mostly pious Christians who firmly believe in the holy person's healing powers. Less frequent are the cases in which the sufferers are Christians rejecting miracles or are heretics or non-Christians, such as Jews and pagans, who after

being miraculously healed glorify God and his saints.⁴ To the category of healing miracles also belong the stories in which the holy man or woman miraculously causes an illness to a healthy faithless person or sinner whom he or she later heals in order to bring about this person's conversion or repentance. Eventually the sufferer acknowledges the saint's divine power, and becomes one of his or her worshippers.

As is obvious, healing narratives have at their very center the human body and its materiality. The diseased and suffering body, which is eventually cured by the saint, not only constitutes the main theme of healing miracle stories;⁵ it is also the kernel around

✦ I should like to thank Alice-Mary Talbot, and the two anonymous readers, most warmly for their extremely helpful suggestions. I am also grateful to Stelios Virvidakis for reading an earlier version of this paper, and for offering insightful comments.

1 See S. Efthymiadis, "Greek Byzantine Collections of Miracles: A Chronological and Bibliographical Survey," *SOs* 74 (1999): 195–211. For a catalogue of the early Byzantine Miracle Collections in particular, see S. F. Johnson, *The Life and Miracles of Thekla: A Literary Study*, Hellenic Studies Series 13 (Washington, DC, and Cambridge, MA, 2006), 239–49.

2 For the variable age and gender of the people searching for healing in miracle accounts of the middle Byzantine period, see A.-M. Talbot, "Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines: The Evidence of Miracle Accounts," *DOP* 56 (2002): 153–73.

3 The popularity of healing miracles included not only in independent collections but also in saints' lives and other hagiographical genres has already been pointed out by other Byzantinists; see, for example, A. Kazhdan, "Holy and Unholy Miracle Workers," in *Byzantine Magic*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington, DC, 1995), 73–82.

4 Exceptions constitute some stories from the miracle collection of Thekla (5th c.) in which the saint heals non-Christians who never convert to Christianity. Such an example is miracle 39. See the edition by G. Dagron, *Vie et miracles de sainte Thècle*, SubsHag 62 (Brussels, 1978), 285–412, 394.

5 Many healing miracle stories are important sources for the history of medicine. A remarkable number of hagiographers—e.g., Sophronios (7th c.), author of Cyrus and John's miracles; Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (ca. 1256–1335), author of a collection of miracles performed by the Virgin at the Pege monastery; and John Lazaropoulos (14th c.), author of a collection of Saint Eugenios's miracles—do not just demonstrate their medical knowledge at the level of terminology but also try to understand and present the etiology of an illness, its symptomatology, and its therapy. See J. O. Rosenqvist, "Miracles and Medical Learning: The Case of St Eugenios of Trebizond," *BSI* 56 (1995): 461–69; A.-M. Talbot, *Healing Shrines in Late Byzantine Constantinople* (Toronto, 1997), 17–22; eadem, "Two Accounts of Miracles at the Pege Shrine in Constantinople," in *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron*,

which the narrative unfolds and, in effect, it is the very reason for the writing of the story. The large majority of healing miracle stories start with the description of the bad and often disgusting state of an ill individual's body and with the presentation of the incurable health problems that he or she faces, followed by his or her desperate seeking for a cure. Such a problematic situation needing an immediate solution is, according to the forerunner of narratology Vladimir Propp, an essential element of the narrative that drives its development.⁶

Thus, in the case of healing miracle stories it is the seriously ill body that becomes the force driving the protagonist forward. He or she undertakes actions, and the narrative proceeds until it reaches its necessary closure. Quite often the sufferer's first move is to visit different doctors, who eventually end up worsening his or her situation.⁷ The sufferer goes to a saint's healing shrine where he or she normally stays until a

cure is achieved.⁸ This might take a few minutes or a few years. Since their main aim is to manifest and venerate a saint's healing powers, all healing narratives have a happy ending strongly related to the body and its image, with which they both start and finish. Of course, in contrast to the beginning of the story, toward its end the body is no longer seriously ill and revolting but healthy, strong, and pleasing.

The human body with its emphasized materiality also plays a central role in miracles of punishment, in which a saint punishes the body of an individual who sins. These miracles lie at the antipodes of the healing ones; while in miracles in the latter category the saint cures a diseased body, in those in the former the holy person suddenly causes an illness in the body of a healthy individual who never recovers. The narratives of punishment close with the dreadful death of the saint's victim, presented by the hagiographers as just and expected.

The theme of the present article is the imagery of the sickly, punished, and suffering body as depicted in healing miracle stories and miracles of punishment found in independent collections composed in the Byzantine period.⁹ In some cases, healing miracles performed by a saint during his or her lifetime or posthumously within the framework of the genre of the *vita* or that of *enkomion* will be also mentioned. However, the following analysis will concentrate on the hagiographical genre of miracle collection. As my title suggests, the approach here will engage with the notions

TM 14 (2002): 605–15, esp. 611–15; Ch. I. Toul, “Τὰ λάματα τῶν ἀγίων Ἀναργύρων,” *ΕΕΒΣ* 42 (1975–76): 253–97. For the use of hagiography as a source for medical history, see J. Duffy, “Byzantine Medicine in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries: Aspects of Teaching and Practice,” *DOP* 38 (1984): 21–27; A. Kazhdan, “The Image of the Medical Doctor in Byzantine Literature of the Tenth to Twelfth Centuries,” in *ibid.*, 43–51; J. Lascaratos, “Miraculous Ophthalmological Therapies in Byzantium,” *Documenta Ophthalmologica* 81.1 (1992): 145–52; J. Lascaratos et al., “Otolaryngological Treatments in Hagiographical Byzantine Texts (324–1453 A.D.): Miracles or Reality?” *Journal of Laryngology and Otolaryngology* 112 (1998): 25–30; J. Lascaratos et al., “Urological Treatments in Byzantine Hagiographical Texts (324–1453 A.D.): Miracles or Reality?” *British Journal of Urology* 79 (1997): 153–58; H. Magoulas, “The Lives of the Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Byzantine Medicine in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries,” *BZ* 57 (1964): 127–50.

6 V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. L. Scott, Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore, and Linguistics 10 (Bloomington, IN, 1958).

7 The physicians' complete incompetence and their juxtaposition with the true healer, namely the saint, are common motifs of healing miracle stories. Hagiographers quite often present the “students of Hippocrates and Galen” as charlatans who cause their clients' condition to worsen and take away their money. As John Duffy puts it, “the general message [given by hagiographers] is ‘Do not expect doctors to do anything for you except to take your money and abandon you as soon as your purse is empty’” (“Byzantine Medicine,” 24; see also Magoulas, “Lives of the Saints as Sources,” 128–33). For a presentation in the hagiographical literature of the middle Byzantine period of the doctor's image, which appears as particularly negative toward the end of the 10th century and is softened afterward, see Kazhdan, “Image of the Medical Doctor,” 45–49.

8 For healing shrines in Byzantium, see Talbot, “Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines” and *Healing Shrines*.

9 After Peter Brown's monumental work *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), a considerable number of studies have been published examining the body in late antique and Byzantine hagiography. See, for example, V. Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia, 2004); eadem, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia, 2008); S. Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances: Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women*, *Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia* 9 (Uppsala, 2005); S. A. Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley, 2006); P. Cox Miller, “Desert Asceticism and ‘The Body from Nowhere,’” *JECrSt* 2 (1994): 137–53, repr. in eadem, *The Poetry of Thought in Late Antiquity: Essays in Imagination and Religion* (Aldershot, 2001), 159–74; and J. Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London, 1995).

of the grotesque,¹⁰ the monstrous, and the uncanny.¹¹ More specifically, I will examine both the grotesque and monstrous images of the diseased, punished, and suffering body in discussing the grotesque cures and acts of violence performed upon the sufferers' bodies by the saints. As the following analysis will show, depictions of the grotesque body in illness, punishment, and therapy are often strongly associated with the concept of the uncanny; in fact, the uncanny appears to be an effect of the grotesque suffering body. In other words, in this article I will present, on the one hand, the nature of the grotesque body—its monstrosity and uncanniness as displayed in miracle stories—and will point out, on the other, the religious function and significance of this body. As I will argue, the grotesque images of the diseased body and its miraculous healings function as vehicles through which the divine makes itself perceptible, enabling both the sufferers and the texts' audiences to understand the great power of God and the restricted limits of their human nature.

The phrase "the monstrosity of the grotesque body" might sound pleonastic, since "grotesque" and "monstrous" are often treated as synonyms.¹² In this case, the term *monstrous* is related to the animality and dehumanization of the human body. It is used to describe the situation of an individual who acquires a monster's body through a grotesque disease, and also the human body that incorporates the bodies of animals. Of course, both kinds of bodies are by definition grotesque, since they transgress the limits of the natural and the normal.¹³

10 The grotesque character of miracle collections has already been acknowledged by the father of hagiography, Hippolyte Delehaye, in his important article on late antique miracle collections; see H. Delehaye, "Les recueils antiques de miracles des saints," *AB* 43 (1925): 1–85, at 14.

11 The notion of the grotesque in late antique hagiographical texts as belonging not to the genre of miracle collection but instead to that of *vita* has been examined by P. Cox Miller in "Is There a Harlot in This Text? Hagiography and the Grotesque," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33 (2003): 419–35.

12 David Williams, for example, in his pioneering work *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Exeter, 1996), employs the two terms interchangeably. In addition Mikhail Bakhtin, the most famous theorist of the grotesque, remarks that "the aesthetics of the grotesque are to a certain extent the aesthetics of the monstrous" (M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky [Bloomington, IN, 1984], 43).

13 All three of the most important 20th-century theorists of the

The notion of the grotesque employed here relies on the insights of Mikhail Bakhtin.¹⁴ In *Rabelais and His World* (1965), where he develops his famous theory about carnival, Bakhtin describes a medieval genre he calls "grotesque realism," which he finds integrated into Rabelais' work. Bakhtin's theory of grotesque realism has as its main principle the material body and its functions, namely "[e]ating, drinking, defecation, and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment,

grotesque—Wolfgang Kayser, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Geoffrey Galt Harpham—see it as a violation of order, reason, established conventions, and the laws of nature; see W. Kayser, *Das Groteske: Seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung* (Oldenburg, 1957); Bakhtin, *Rabelais*; and G. G. Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton, 1982).

14 Unlike other modern literary theories, that of Bakhtin has been favored by (a few) Byzantinists. See, for example, R. Beaton, "The World of Fiction and the World 'Out There': The Case of a Byzantine Novel," in *Strangers to Themselves: The Byzantine Outsider*, ed. D. Smythe (Aldershot, 2002), 179–88; S. Constantinou, "Generic Hybrids: The 'Life' of Synkletike and the 'Life' of Theodora of Arta," *JÖB* 56 (2006): 113–33; L. Garland, "Street Life in Constantinople: Women and the Carnavalesque" and "Imperial Women and Entertainment in the Middle Byzantine Court," in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*, ed. eadem (London, 2006), 163–76, 177–92; S. MacAlister, *Dreams and Suicides: The Greek Novel from Antiquity to the Byzantine Empire* (London, 1996); M. Mullett, "Travel Genres and the Unexpected," in *Travel in Byzantium*, ed. R. Macrides, Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies 10 (Aldershot, 2002), 259–84; eadem, "Novelisation in Byzantium: Narrative after the Revival of Fiction," in *Byzantine Narrative: Papers in Honor of Roger Scott*, ed. J. Burke et al., *Byzantina Australiensia* 16 (Melbourne, 2006), 1–28; and P. Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia: A Poetics of the Twelfth-Century Novel*, *Hellenic Studies* 10 (Cambridge, MA, 2006). In contrast, so many Western medievalists employ Bakhtinian theory that they cannot be easily counted. They include T. Davenport, *Medieval Narrative: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2004); T. J. Farrell, *Bakhtin and Medieval Voices* (Gainesville, FL, 1995); W. McLellan, "Bakhtin's Theory of Dialogic Discourse, Medieval Rhetorical Theory and the Multi-Voiced Structure of the Clerk's Tale," *Exemplaria* 1 (1989): 461–88; S. G. Nichols, "Amorphous Imitation: Bakhtin, Augustine and the Roman d'Enéas," in *Romance: Generic Transformation from Chrétien de Troyes to Cervantes*, ed. K. Brownlee and M. S. Brownlee (Hanover, NH, 1985), 47–73; and J. M. Ziolkowski, *Fairy Tales from Before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2007). For more studies on Bakhtin and medieval literature and culture, see C. Adam and S. David, *The Annotated Bakhtin Bibliography*, Modern Humanities Research Association Bibliographies 1 (Leeds, 2000). I would like to thank Margaret Mullett for informing me about studies by Byzantinists employing Bakhtin, which had escaped my attention.

swallowing up by another body.”¹⁵ For Bakhtin, the body performing these functions to an exaggerated, hyperbolic, and excessive degree is a grotesque body. “The grotesque body,” he continues,

is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose.¹⁶

In Bakhtin’s theory, the grotesque body has six essential features, which are closely interrelated. First, its lower bodily parts, both external and internal, are exalted and acquire importance. These include the genitals, the intestines, the bowels, the belly, and the buttocks. Often the internal and external parts and organs are merged into one. Second, equally essential are the body’s orifices, those points at which the body opens out to the world and to other persons: the mouth, the anus, the nose, the ears, the phallus, and the vagina. Third, the grotesque body is related to food. It is a devouring body, a body in the process of overindulging, eating, drinking, vomiting, and defecating. Fourth, “base” bodily products, such as feces, urine, semen, and menstrual flow, are in the case of the grotesque body celebrated, since they are viewed as essential elements of the bodily life and of its relation to the life of the earth. Fifth, the grotesque body is a body in flux, its power expressed through the processes of eating and defecating, of dying and giving birth. Sixth, the grotesque body is not a single body but at least two bodies combined into one as a result of its combination of life’s two contradictory processes: birth and death, each of which is manifest in a separate body. Through the grotesque body’s functions, one body gives birth and dies while a second body is conceived, generated, and born. As Bakhtin himself puts it, “From one body a new

body always emerges in some form or another.”¹⁷ In other words, next to a senile, decaying, and deformed body coexist a new flesh and life. The grotesque body “is dying and as yet unfinished; [it] stands on the threshold of the grave and the crib.”¹⁸

Apart from the grotesque body, Bakhtin argues that another important principle of grotesque realism is laughter. The Russian theorist rejects the presence of fear in medieval grotesque, which, according to him, “filled with the spirit of carnival, liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying: it takes away all fears and is therefore completely gay and bright.”¹⁹ The following analysis will show, however, that medieval grotesque was not devoid of terror and uncanny effects.

The term *uncanny* is used here in Sigmund Freud’s sense. In his 1919 essay of that title, Freud places the uncanny in “the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread.”²⁰ For Freud, the uncanny can be described as all the experiences and images that are simultaneously familiar and strange. Even though the uncanny has a “secret nature,” it is “actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed.”²¹ As the return of the repressed, the uncanny is horrifying because it blurs the boundaries between the familiar and the unfamiliar, life and death, object and subject—a blurring that makes the individual feel out of place.

Although for Bakhtin the medieval grotesque has nothing to do with the uncanny and the frightening, his theory might well be associated with Freud’s notion of the uncanny as the return of the repressed. Bakhtin’s grotesque body also refers to aspects of human life and experience that have been rejected and repressed. The lower bodily stratum and its functions and products, which the official culture treats as taboo and eliminates, are celebrated and stressed by the grotesque body, which situates them at the center of human reality.

According to Bakhtin, grotesque realism is a product of the carnival culture of the Middle Ages. Interestingly, he founds his theory of grotesque realism

15 Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 317.

16 Ibid., 26.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 47.

20 S. Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. D. McLintock (London, 2003), 123.

21 Ibid., 148.

on the belief that Rabelais' work has its origins in carnival culture, which it reconstructs. But Rabelais neither depicts any scenes of medieval carnival nor elevates carnival culture. In other words, Rabelais' work, which certainly portrays a world recognized as grotesque not only by Bakhtin but also by previous critics,²² is neither about carnival nor wholly its product. Rabelais draws on both folktales and learned culture. As Richard Berrong rightly argues,

The function and position of popular culture [i.e., medieval carnival culture] in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is by no means the unchanging, completely dominant monolith described by Mikhail Bakhtin. In *Pantagruel* popular culture operates on a par with, but not to the exclusion of, learned culture. In *Gargantua* one can watch Rabelais exclude it from his narrative, until, with the Third Book, he shuts it out almost entirely. As of the Fourth Book, the author allows popular culture back into his narrative to a limited extent, but often with negative connotations and almost never in association with his figures of power and authority.²³

The laws of carnival culture do not thus determine the form that the grotesque takes in Rabelais' work upon which Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque is based. An approach to Byzantine healing miracle stories focusing on grotesque bodies from the perspective of Bakhtin's theory is therefore valid even though miracle collections are not the products of a carnival culture but the creations of a dominant religious culture: the large majority of these collections are written by churchmen (bishops or priests) and monks. Interestingly, healing and punishment narratives, as the analysis provided here will show, thematize the human body, its materiality, and its functions in the grotesque dimensions described by Bakhtin. For this reason Bakhtin's theory is a useful tool for approaching and better understanding these intriguing narratives that have not been yet sufficiently studied.

22 Victor Hugo, for example, referred to the grotesque aspect of Rabelais' work; see Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 125–28.

23 R. Berrong, *Rabelais and Bakhtin: Popular Culture in Gargantua and Pantagruel* (Lincoln, NE, 1986), 121.



In a considerable number of healing and punishment miracle stories found in Byzantine collections of all periods, the health problems of the saints' victims and clientele, along with their bodily effects and the miraculous therapies performed, are linked with what Bakhtin calls the "lower stratum" of the body—the body's orifices—and with "base" bodily products. Many heroes and heroines appearing in these collections suffer from diseases such as dysentery, colic, elephantiasis, dropsy, and genital ailments. Because of these diseases their bodies are continuously changing: they gradually lose their usual form and size as grotesque swellings appear in various lower parts or on the whole body. As a result of their grotesque situation, the sufferers' bodies are open to the world, exposing their internal problems. They also produce excessive quantities of foul substances such as vomit, diarrhea, urine, pus, blood, and viscous liquids of putrefaction that breed worms. These products come out from the suffering bodies through the mouth, the anus, the vagina, the penis, and the skin. Everything that issues from the orifices of the patients' bodies can be an effect of both their diseases and the saints' therapies. Frequently the saints expel the disease from the patients' bodies through the dirty substances that are associated with it, and in so doing they purify the body and restore it to health.

In the collection of Artemios's miracles,²⁴ to give a specific example of a grotesque disease and its equally grotesque treatment, forty-one out of forty-five stories refer to hernias and testicular and genital

24 For other approaches to this collection, see, for example, V. Déroche, "Pourquoi écrivait-on des recueils des miracles? L'exemple des miracles de Saint Artemios," in *Les saints et leur sanctuaire à Byzance*, ed. C. Jolivet-Lévy et al., Byzantina Sorbonensia 11 (Paris, 1993), 95–116; S. Efthymiades, "A Day and Ten Months in the Life of a Lonely Bachelor: The Other Byzantium in *Miracula S. Artemii* 18 and 22," *DOP* 58 (2004): 1–25; A. Kazhdan and L. Sherry, "Miracles of St. Artemios," in *Aetos: Studies in Honour of Cyril Mango Presented to Him on April 14, 1998*, ed. I. Ševčenko and I. Hütter (Stuttgart, 1998), 200–209; D. Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia, 2004), 63–70; L. Rydén, "Gaza, Emesa and Constantinople: Late Ancient Cities in the Light of Hagiography," in *Aspects of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium*, ed. idem and J. O. Rosenqvist, Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, Transactions 4 (Uppsala, 1993), 133–44.

diseases.²⁵ The persons suffering from these illnesses generally have extremely swollen testicles and terrible pains that prevent them from walking properly and leading a normal life. The usual therapy undertaken by Artemios, who mostly appears in the sufferers' dreams, is quite appalling in its grotesque and violent form:²⁶ after asking the patient to remove his clothes, the saint squeezes or kicks the hugely swollen testicles so forcefully that the patient awakes in severe pain to find his genitals healed; in some instances, his clothes are wet.²⁷ There are cases, such as the third miracle, in which the saint cuts out the patient's tumor with a sword, filling the church with an unbearable stench, and the previously sick man is covered with blood, pus, and, less frequently, worms.

Artemios's healing methods are shocking in part because a holy man distinguished by his purity comes

down from heaven to squeeze a lower part of the male body that is considered taboo. Even more appalling, through the saint's intervention the filthy and smelly fluids released from the sick man's genitals defile the holy space of the church. The debasement of what is high and holy in Artemios's miracles and in other hagiographical texts, a subject that falls outside of the focus of this article, invokes Bakhtin's concept of grotesque realism: its third essential principle is what the Russian theorist calls "degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract."²⁸

The swollen testicles and the disgusting smell and liquids emitted from the bodies of many of the protagonists in Artemios's miracles are, as already suggested, highly grotesque. But the same miracle collection contains stories in which the patient's situation becomes even more grotesque due to its excessive character. Consider miracle 22, whose protagonist is a sixty-two-year-old man:

[I]n addition to the illnesses which he had, his genitals now sank right down below his knees so that he could not join his knees together nor even turn to right or left. . . . [The] length [of his hernia] was twenty fingers and its width thirty. . . . [H]e was ashamed to report his additional illness to the doctors. . . . To him [the chief physician], as though to a friend, the sick man confided his misfortune. . . . The chief physician, when he saw it, was astounded and struck his forehead. . . . When night approached . . . he [the patient] fell asleep and saw the saint. . . . [H]e [the saint] pulled out a surgeon's scalpel and . . . with the point of the scalpel he touched the skin of the patient's right testicle. . . . The spot which the saint touched with the scalpel was . . . constantly oozing small drops and filling his whole bed with moisture and the moisture coming out was foul smelling. . . . To one of the assistants, who had dined and was sleeping, the saint appeared in a dream . . . and said to him: "Run to the hospital and care for the patient with diseased genitals." And he assisted him in the dream as to what he ought to do. After the assistant woke up, he came running. . . . And when . . . he uncovered

25 Artemios's miracle collection is unique as the only Byzantine miracle collection devoted almost entirely to the healing of male genital diseases. Such diseases with similar grotesque symptoms having both comic and uncanny effects are depicted in miracle collections from all periods, but in a much smaller number of healing narratives. In most cases, at least one healing miracle has as its theme the treatment of a male or a female genital disease. In female genital diseases, the usual symptom is continuous and excessive hemorrhage—another grotesque symptom of a grotesque disease, according to Bakhtin's theory, but one that of course provokes not laughter but horror. In this instance, the extreme bodily outpouring signifies the openness of the female body, which is another characteristic of the Bakhtinian grotesque body. See, for instance, miracle 4 from Lazaropoulos's collection of Eugenios's miracles (*Synopsis*, ed. J. O. Rosenqvist, *The Hagiographic Dossier of St. Eugenios of Trebizond in Codex Athous Dionysii 154*, *Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia* 5 [Uppsala, 1996], 246–359, at 264–68), in which the menstrual flow of a woman named Eumorphia continuously increases in intensity until she is at the point of death.

26 For the violent yet healing touch of the saint in miracle stories, see P. Cox Miller, "Visceral Seeing: The Holy Body in Late Ancient Christianity," *JECrSt* 12 (2004): 391–411, esp. 398–401.

27 The Virgin in a miracle from Xanthopoulos's collection performs a similar treatment. According to Xanthopoulos's account, a man suffering from dropsy, which causes his entire body to swell greatly, sees the Virgin in a dream removing his clothes and touching his genitals. When he wakes up he finds himself cured, and wet from the liquids released from his body through the Virgin's intervention. See the edition by A. Pamperis, *Λόγος διαλαμβάνων τὰ περὶ τῆς συστάσεως τοῦ σεβασμίτου οἴκου τῆς ὑπεραγίας Δεσποίνης ἡμῶν Θεοτόκου τῆς ἀειζώου πηγῆς ἐτι δὲ καὶ, περὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπερφύως τελεσθέντων θαυμάτων* (Leipzig, 1802), 1–99 (miracle 57, pp. 78–82). At this point I would like to thank Stephanos Efthymiades for providing me with this rare text, as well as some secondary literature used for the writing of this article.

28 Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 19.

the patient and upon seeing him was amazed and anxiously cried: "Lord have mercy" and all the others were likewise astonished at what had happened. Raising him from the bed and sitting him on a commode, he examined his testicles which were not in the condition they had been in shortly before but swollen up to six fingers. And from the hole made by the holy martyr, pus was hanging as though on a slender thread. So grabbing this with his fingers the assistant drew it forth. And as far as he drew it, the thicker it got and stretched to a length of one cubit. While draining his testicles, he [the assistant] filled two buckets with fluid, blood and pus.²⁹

Unlike Artemios's other patients, this anonymous man does not suffer from a genital disease alone, but it is on his genital disease, which is much worse than the others, that the narrative focuses. The seriousness of the illness is shown in the protagonist's great bodily deformity, and in the large quantity of noxious liquids released from his right testicle. The unbearable stench associated with the man's extremely large genitals and the endless stream of pus that becomes thicker and longer as it is squeezed out create a disgusting and horrifying situation, which strikes not only for the patient and his attendants but also those who read or hear the text as uncanny.

In this grotesque image of the protagonist's body, there is a chilling return of the repressed knowledge that human beings possess a perishable flesh, which as it putrefies emits a stench and liquids that resemble those coming out from the man's body. As this knowledge returns our horror rises, since the boundaries between life and death collapse. The patient here is an old man who suffers from an incurable illness that makes a normal life impossible. Neither fully alive nor wholly dead, he lies somewhere between life and death, still oozing and flowing. He is filthy, dirty, and smelly. His state is offensive to all the senses, and therefore he is treated as taboo.

The protagonist's transitional status between life and death constitutes a further manifestation of the

Bakhtinian grotesque body—a double body in which both the body of life and that of death coexist. When the saint appears in the man's dream, his sick and dying body does not vanish, as is the case in most miracles of Artemios's collection. Instead of effecting an immediate cure, the saint in this story worsens the man's grotesque situation by provoking an excessive leakage of revolting bodily fluids. The protagonist's cure is postponed until all liquids and substances accumulated in his genitals can be released through the cut made by the saint and wiped away by one of the physicians looking after him.

Faced with the old man's excessively swollen genitals, the saint undertakes a treatment that involves dirty and smelly bodily products.³⁰ Such a grotesque treatment performed by a saint who specializes in the healing of grotesque diseases reveals a paradoxical relation between the holy and the grotesque that, as implied earlier, pervades the whole collection of Artemios's miracles. The association of the sacred with the grotesque can be seen not only in miracle collections but also in other hagiographical genres, such as the collective biography and the saint's vita.³¹ In both of those genres, it is the holy person him- or herself who acquires a grotesque body following an illness provoked by a harsh ascetic life.

Symeon Stylites the Elder, for example, according to the account of Theodoret of Cyrhus (ca. 393–ca. 457), developed on his left foot a malignant ulcer from which a great deal of pus continually oozed. This was an effect of the saint's constant standing on his tall

30 A very similar treatment is performed by the saints Cosmas and Damian in the case of a man suffering from a very hard tumor that develops on the flesh of his testicles. Saint Cosmas appears in his dream and gives him poultices of a waxy substance to apply to his testicles. The tumor dissolves, but a large amount of liquids accumulates in his testicles and causes further swelling. Cosmas, accompanied by Damian, pays the man another nocturnal visit. The two saints puncture his testicles with a small instrument resembling a needle, and as a result all the liquids are released, the testicles regain their original size, and the man is healed. See the edition by E. Rupprecht, *Cosmae et Damiani sanctorum medicorum vitam et miracula e codice Londinensi* (Berlin, 1935), 72–73 (miracle 34).

31 The term *collective biography* was coined by Patricia Cox Miller to denote biographical collections of saints and desert fathers, such as the *Lausiac History* by Palladius, the *Historia Monachorum*, and Theodoret's *Historia Religiosa*. See P. Cox Miller, "Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography: Constructing the Subject as Holy," in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. T. Hägg and P. Rousseau (Berkeley, 2000), 209–54.

29 Trans. V. Crisafulli in V. S. Crisafulli and J. W. Nesbitt, *The Miracles of St. Artemios: A Collection of Miracle Stories by an Anonymous Author of Seventh-Century Byzantium*, *Medieval Mediterranean* 13 (Leiden, 1997), 133, 135, 137.

pillar.³² Similarly, a saintly monk called John from the Life of Lazaros of Galesion (eleventh century) has a mouth affliction that causes foul saliva to leak continuously from his mouth, soaking his tunic while maggots breed in the putrefaction. At some point John's body becomes paralyzed as a result of his harsh standing discipline, and he is forced to lie down. Because of this immobility the flesh from his thighs right down to the soles of his feet becomes as cold as a corpse's; simultaneously, his feet putrefy and fill with maggots while a sore develops on his shoulders and gives off an unbearable stench.³³ And Taïsia, the protagonist of another saint's life, seeking repentance for her sinful life as a harlot, happily accepts the punishment imposed on her by the monk Serapios—to be enclosed in a claustrophobic cell where she performs all her bodily functions. Serapios condemns her to spend the rest of her life next to her own excrement.³⁴

The stories of these saints show that they are humiliated by close contact with the material in its grotesque dimensions, only to be ultimately elevated through such contact. The presentation of the sacred and the divine as both unclean and pure has its model in the Bible, where Christ, for instance, is both bloodied and transfigured. In addition, Christ is depicted placing his healing fingers in the ears of a deaf and dumb man, and touching the man's tongue with spit (Mark 7:31–37). In another miracle, he cures a blind man by applying a paste of dirt and saliva to his eyes (John 9:1–41). Christ performs his divinity by transforming dirt and “base” bodily products, such as spit, into healing substances. He is God because he can heal, purify, and exalt everything he touches despite its diseased and filthy status. Imitating Christ, Artemios purifies and heals male genitals by touching or squeezing them, and in so doing he displays his own divine power.

As for the saints whose grotesque bodies are caused by their way of life, Taïsia has to spend the rest of her life in her own bodily waste so that she may be forgiven for her former sexual sins and achieve holiness.

The grotesque bodies of Symeon Stylites and the monk John function as signs of their spiritual transcendence and holiness, disclosing the potentiality of the divine world. Through these ascetics' grotesque bodies, their visitors and disciples as well as the faithful audience of their stories participate in the form of piety to which these very bodies point. The more grotesque their bodies appear, the greater their holiness and the greater the glory of God.

A number of Byzantine healing narratives deal with other taboos that also belong to the category of the grotesque, and in so doing they further manifest the ability of the sacred to transform the filthy and the base into the miraculous. Human urine and feces, in both their excessive production and their retention, play a central role in many healing miracles. Miracles referring to urinary problems and their treatment are found more frequently in the anonymous miracle collection of the Virgin of the Source monastery (tenth century) and the writings of Xanthopoulos, who reworks the earlier anonymous collection and adds to it some more miracles performed during his lifetime.³⁵ Another hagiographical text, not belonging to the genre of miracle collection, is the oration on the translation of patriarch Athanasios's relics (fourteenth century) to which the author Theoktistos the Studite appends thirty-nine posthumous miracles, including six healings of urinary problems. As Alice-Mary Talbot notes, urinary problems are the second most frequently mentioned in the oration, after mental diseases.³⁶

The patients with urinary problems suffer either from incontinence or retention of urine. Quite often the retention of urine, called *dysuria* by the hagiographers, is presented as the result of bladder stones blocking the urethra. The patients' urinary problems cause them great and incurable pain, leading them to seek assistance from the Virgin and the saints. The

32 See the edition by P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghen, *Théodoret de Cyr, Histoire des moines de Syrie, Histoire Philothée, Traité sur la charité*, vol. 2, SC 257 (Paris, 1979), 206, 26.23.1–3.

33 *AASS*, Nov. 3 (1910): 508–606, at 559, §§167–68.

34 Edition by F. Nau, “Histoire de Thaïs: Publication des textes grecs inédits et de divers autres textes et versions,” *Annales du Musée Guimet* 30.1 (1902): 51–113, A, p. 100, lines 8–13.

35 For the miracle collections of the Source monastery, see S. Efthymiadis, “Le monastère de la Source à Constantinople et ses deux recueils de miracles: Entre hagiographie et patriographie,” *REB* 64–65 (2006–07): 283–309; Talbot, “Two Accounts of Miracles at the Pege Shrine” (n. 5 above); and eadem, “The Anonymous *Miracula* of the Pege Shrine in Constantinople,” *Palaeoslavica* 10 (2002): 222–28.

36 A.-M. Talbot, *Faith Healing in Late Byzantium: The Posthumous Miracles of the Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople by Theoktistos the Studite*, Archbishop Iakovos Library of Ecclesiastical and Historical Sources 8 (Brookline, MA, 1983), 17.

treatment offered by the holy persons is usually hydroposia (water drinking), after which the production of large quantities of urine stops, if the sufferer is incontinent, or extreme quantities of urine pass, if the patient suffers from dysuria.³⁷ Here the healing water, which alludes to the biblical living water offered by Christ to the Samaritan woman (John 4:14), also has a symbolic function. It is the pure, clean, and sanctified liquid that expels the dirty, diseased, and life-threatening urine, and in so doing it both cures an individual's urinary disease and strengthens his or her faith in the miraculous powers of the Virgin or of the saints performing such healings.

In the miracles that deal with urinary problems, the miraculous water might come from the spring waters of the holy person's monastery (Virgin of the Source); it could also be the water in which the saint's relics have been washed (Athanasios, Eugenios of Trebizond).³⁸ Somewhat unexpectedly, a man described in the miracles of Cosmas and Damian (sixth century) as suffering from retention of urine is ordered by the saints in a dream to drink a mixture made of normal water and the burnt pubic hair of a lamb, a prescription derived from the realm of magic.³⁹ The drinking of this rather dirty mixture enables the man to painlessly release all the urine accumulated in his body and be cured. The poisonous urine flowing from the man's body, like the liquids discharged from the old man's genitals in Artemios's miracle, has a therapeutic function: by its very release, the dangerous disease is taken away.

In comparison with urine, feces turn up in more texts (both miracle collections and other hagiographical narratives), have more functions, and play a more complicated role. Urine and urination appear in the healing stories only in the context of disease.⁴⁰

Excrement, in contrast, while associated with diseases whose symptoms are fecal incontinence, constipation (Cyrus and John's collection, miracles 5 and 42; Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger, §115),⁴¹ or excretion not from the anus but from other orifices, such as the vagina (Life of Symeon Stylites the Younger, §114; Xanthopoulos's miracles of the Source, miracle 51),⁴² is discussed in other contexts as well.

Animal feces, for instance, are used on a saint's advice as a therapeutic cream to heal a wound or a skin disease such as leprosy (Cyrus and John's collection, miracles 13 and 23).⁴³ In addition, defecation provoked by the miraculous saint operates as a channel through which an unrelated disease, such as *choirades* (scrofulous swellings), is expelled (Thekla's collection, miracle 11).⁴⁴ By defecation are likewise expelled the animals that have entered an individual's body through the mouth (Cyrus and John's collection, miracle 21; Isaiah's collection, miracle 3; Life of Nikon, §56).⁴⁵ In all these cases, despite being dirty and disgusting, defecation functions as a very useful activity, since it leads to a cure.

Apart from its relationship to diseases and therapies, excrement, both human and animal, is also associated with the devil and madness. Both the excrement produced by the devil's intervention and that linked to madness are viewed as negative, provoking disgust in the texts' heroes and heroines. An example of the devil's

to have a genital disease that he later heals. See A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Varia graeca sacra* (St. Petersburg, 1909), 17–20; repr. in Crisafulli and Nesbitt, *Miracles of St. Artemios* (n. 29 above), 108–14.

41 See the edition by N. Fernández Marcos, *Los thaumata de Sofronio: Contribución al estudio de la "incubatio" cristiana* (Madrid, 1975), 249–51, 343–46 (now available in a French translation by J. Gascou, *Sophronie de Jérusalem: Miracles des saints Cyr et Jean (BHG I 477–479)* [Paris, 2006]). For the Life of Symeon, see the edition by P. van den Ven, *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le jeune (521–592)*, vol. 1, SubsHag 32 (Brussels, 1962), 1–224, at 94.

42 See van den Ven, *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon*, 94, and Pamperis, *Αόγος* (n. 27 above), 69–70.

43 See Fernández Marcos, *Los thaumata di Sofronio*, 269–71, 285–87.

44 See Dagron, *Vie et miracles de sainte Thècle* (n. 4 above), 312–14.

45 See Fernández Marcos, *Los thaumata de Sofronio*, 282–83; for the miracles of Isaiah, see the edition by H. Delehay, "Synaxarium et miracula S. Isaiae prophetae," *AB* 42 (1924): 257–65, at 261, §4; and for the Life of Nikon, see the edition by D. F. Sullivan, *The Life of Saint Nikon*, Archbishop Iakovos Library of Ecclesiastical and Historical Sources 14 (Brookline, MA, 1987), 27–271, at 178.

37 In Athanasios's miracles, most people suffering from urinary problems are healed by anointing themselves with oil from the vigil lamp hanging over the saint's relics. See the edition by A.-M. Talbot, *ibid.*, 94, §44.

38 See *ibid.*, 90, §39; miracle 18 from Lazaropoulos's collection, in Rosenqvist, *Hagiographic Dossier of St. Eugenios* (n. 25 above), 298, line 931.

39 See the edition by L. Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian: Texte und Einleitung* (Leipzig, 1907), 104–7 (miracle 3).

40 There is only one exception: in miracle 17 in Artemios's collection, an actor urinates in the church of Saint John the Forerunner in Oxeia (Constantinople), where Artemios's relics are deposited, and as result the martyr punishes the sacrilegious man by causing him

relation to excrement is provided by a miracle from Cyrus and John's collection.⁴⁶ In this story, the devil, seeking to punish a man named George for going to the saints' shrine in an effort to get rid of the demon that follows him, makes a crow void every night above the place where George sleeps, thereby dirtying both the man and his bed. Human excrement often plays a central role in mental illness; the afflicted seeking a cure from a saint are depicted eating their own feces (Life of Mary the Younger, miracle 2),⁴⁷ relieving themselves in public, and living next to their own excrement (collection of Cosmas and Damian, miracle 33).⁴⁸ In these cases, excrement has no association with the divine, and the hagiographers as well as their heroes or heroines treat it exclusively as a base, evil, impure, and humiliating product to be avoided. Here excrement appears as an object out of place, as the reason for confusion and disorder, and as the root of evil.

Like all the images of the physical lower stratum presented so far, those of urine and of the feces related to the divine are ambivalent. On the one hand, they debase and degenerate, and on the other, they are exalted through their contact with the divine, as a result of which they heal and renew the patients' bodies. In comparison to other images of the grotesque body discussed here, scatological images are closer to laughter. In fact, scatology, as Bakhtin also argues, has the power to arouse laughter. In his words, "excrement represents bodies and matter that are mostly comic."⁴⁹



As already stated, in some healing narratives the grotesque body of the diseased protagonist leads to his or her dehumanization and subsequent transformation into a monster. Serapamon, for example, in a story from the collection of Cyrus and John's miracles suffers from *scirrhus*—that is, a hard, fibrous cancerous tumor—which originally appears on one of his feet. As time passes, the disease spreads upward until it reaches his genitals. According to the narrator, the affected area of Serapamon's body swells so much that the man

is transformed into a horrifying monster.⁵⁰ Eugenios, a patient from Cyrus and John's collection who suffers from dropsy, acquires as a result of his disease an abdomen so swollen that "he resembles the big dragons."⁵¹

The element of monstrosity is also apparent in the stories in which various creatures, such as leeches, worms, snakes, and frogs, are incorporated into human bodies. In most cases, they enter when the protagonists unknowingly swallow them. Once within a human body, these creatures bite the victim's internal organs, producing great pain. Through the healing saints' intervention, the swallowed creatures exit alive either by the mouth, when the victim vomits or sneezes, or through the anus, when the victim defecates. In most cases, both the vomiting and defecation take place after the suffering individual eats or drinks what the saint has ordered.

Consider the story of Barbara, a noble woman from Trebizond and the protagonist of a miracle from Lazaropoulos's *Synopsis* of Eugenios's miracles.⁵² Barbara swallows a leech when she drinks some water from a well, and its movements inside her body cause her unbearable suffering. According to the narrator, the leech "penetrating from her chest wanders as far as her right nostril and her temples and forehead."⁵³ Barbara gets rid of the leech as soon as oil from the saint's lamp is poured into her right nostril, and it leaves in the following grotesque way: "After a short while a violent sneezing befell her, then a second one, and at her third sneezing—O miracle!—The leech, filled with blood and thick as the forefinger of a sturdy man, . . . fell on the ground."⁵⁴

The monstrosity of a number of persons depicted in healing miracles also shares to some extent in the

46 See Fernández Marcos, *Los thaumata de Sofronio*, 387–89 (miracle 67).

47 See the edition in *AASS*, Nov. 4 (1925): 692–705, at 698, §13.

48 Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian*, 180–83.

49 Bakhtin, *Rabelais* (n. 12 above), 152.

50 See Fernández Marcos, *Los thaumata de Sofronio*, 283–84 (miracle 22).

51 Ibid., 343–44 (miracle 42). According to Xanthopoulos's account of the Virgin's miracles, to give the example of a second miracle collection, the grotesque diseases of a number of patients result in their transformation into monsters. See Pamperis, *Λόγος*, 60 (miracle 47), 72 (miracle 54), 74 (miracle 55).

52 See Rosenqvist, *Hagiographic Dossier of St. Eugenios* (n. 25 above), 268–70 (miracle 5).

53 Trans. J. O. Rosenqvist, *ibid.*, 271.

54 Ibid. Healing narratives dealing with the entrance of animals into human bodies can be found in miracle collections and other hagiographical genres of different periods. See, e.g., Cyrus and John's miracles (miracles 18, 23, 26, 34, 44, 58), Isaiah's miracles (miracle 3), Life of Nikon (§§55, 56), the oration on Athanasios I (miracle 12), and Eugenios's miracles by Lazaropoulos (miracles 5, 10).

uncanniness of the grotesque bodies presented earlier. In their grotesque functions and appearances, the monstrous bodies signify the return of humanity's repressed animality, a fact that likewise renders them horrifying. Through monstrosity, the limits between human identity and animality disappear and the individual feels displaced. The miracle stories thematizing monstrosity, like those presenting other bodily grotesqueries, manifest the vulnerability of human nature, its tendency to fall into evil situations, and its consequent need for divine help. These stories suggest that only a divine force can prevent the transformation of individuals into dreadful creatures.

The healings of such grotesque and monstrous bodies remind the texts' audiences of the saints' divine power to triumph over death and any evil and uncanny condition, a recognition that, on the one hand, strengthens Christian faith and, on the other, helps Christians suppress their anxieties about illness, dehumanization, and death. The cures of such grotesquely diseased and seemingly incurable bodies enable the faithful to be optimistic. They symbolize the possibility that human beings may regain their lost humanity and overcome evil and death with the aid of the divine.

The association of the grotesque with the uncanny and the monstrous can also be detected in some miracles of punishment in which the victim is violently attacked by the devil appearing in the form of a horrific monster. Here monstrosity is not, as it was in the healing miracles, a temporary condition of the individual's body and self but instead an evil Other sent to destroy the sinful protagonist. The victim's condemnation to death, which is followed by bodily annihilation, is given visible form in the grotesque image of his or her uncanny body that terrifies both the victim and all the bystanders.

A case in point is a miracle from Thekla's collection whose protagonist is a young man named Orention.⁵⁵ According to the story, Orention is consumed by a wild desire for a beautiful woman he sees in church during the celebration of the saint's feast day. In a prayer, he asks the saint to help him possess the woman's body, a lustful wish that leads to his grotesque punishment: in the middle of the night, while everyone is asleep, a madly enraged and wild demon attacks Orention. It tears the man's flesh and strips off his skin,

filling him with pus and worms. Orention's horrific tortures last for three days, until finally the demon kills him. This prolonged grotesque scene takes place before the appalled eyes of all the people gathered to celebrate the saint's feast day, who after hearing the noise caused by the demon's attack wake up and stay awake for three days. The bystanders' terror is shared by the hagiographer, who acknowledges the story's horror and declares that he managed to write it down only with the utmost difficulty, since while he was writing his hand was trembling with great fear.⁵⁶

The image of Orention's punished body does not differ from that of the diseased bodies depicted in healing miracles. In both cases, the grotesque body is often associated with uncanny elements causing putrefaction and death. But the punished and the healed body differ in a significant way. In the first, death suddenly occurs to a sinful living person, whereas the reverse process occurs in the second: life is restored to the dying faithful person through the saint's miraculous intervention.

The grotesque punishments and therapies performed by the saints suggest that the divine, as the absolute Other, manifests itself in horrifying, and sometimes comic, grotesque forms. It is through such grotesque situations that human beings can understand the greatness and the alterity of the divine. As Patricia Cox Miller has suggested in discussing the bestial sides of the divine seen by early Christian thinkers such as Origen, it is only through images that God can be viewed and understood by humans. In the literature examined by Miller these images derive from the worlds of beasts and hybrid monsters, such as the centaur and the satyr.⁵⁷ In the healing miracles explored here, God reveals his truth through grotesque bodily images often associated with both animals and monsters.



Byzantine healing miracles concentrating on grotesque and monstrous bodies, which are the symptoms of unnatural diseases or divine punishments, suggest more clearly than do other healing miracles that

55 See Dagron, *Vie et miracles de sainte Thècle*, 376–80 (miracle 33).

56 For the identity of Thekla's hagiographer, see Krueger, *Writing and Holiness* (n. 24 above), 79–93.

57 Cox Miller, *Poetry of Thought* (n. 9 above).

these very bodies function as signs of a higher reality. The examined texts' emphasis on the human body's fleshliness—underscored by its deepest materiality as represented by bodily products such as excrement and urine—moves their audiences to an understanding of the body's participation in a spiritual dimension of existence. The mind is awakened to the deeper mysteries of human embodiment, which inhabits the realm of the material as well as the spiritual. The ability of the grotesque to open the human mind to the level of the divine is the reason why, as David Williams suggests, medieval art and literature made the grotesque the “semiology of metaphysics.”⁵⁸

58 Williams, *Deformed Discourse* (n. 12 above), 110.

All in all, the healing miracles discussed above demonstrate that out of the grotesque body can come the creative force of regeneration, both bodily and spiritual. The grotesque body prepares the faithful to open themselves to the holy and to the experience of the supernatural through which human and worldly limits can be realized. These healing miracles show in the most graphic way that human embodiment at its most material is the very condition of spirituality.

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